

In the claims: The claims are as follows.

1. (Currently amended) An apparatus for use in providing user inputs to a communication or computing device, ~~characterized by comprising:~~

an input button ~~(14)~~ provided as a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle (14a) formed on the exposed surface for receiving a distal end of an end portion (12) of an indicator instrument (11) unattached to the input button, for moving or deforming in response to and for receiving a force exerted on the input button (14) using via the indicator instrument (11); and

means (14b-e) disposed proximate to the receptacle for detecting the force exerted on the input button (14) based on the input button moving or deforming of the input button (14) in response to the force, and for providing a signal corresponding to the force.

2. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the ~~means (14b-e)~~ for detecting the force exerted on the input button ~~(14)~~ comprises a strain sensor.

3. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the ~~means (14b-e)~~ for detecting the force exerted on the input button ~~(14)~~ comprises a sensor that transmits a signal corresponding to the force at least in respect to the direction of the force.

4. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the ~~means (14b-e)~~ for detecting the force exerted on the input button ~~(14)~~ comprises a sensor that transmits a signal corresponding to the force at least in respect to the magnitude of the force.

5. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the means—(14b-e) for detecting the force exerted on the input button (14) comprises a sensor that transmits a signal until the force is removed.

6. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button—(14) moves or deforms so as to communicate to the means—(14b-e) for detecting the force exerted on the input button (14) a signal corresponding to a user action selected from the set consisting of clicking, scrolling, selecting, pointing, cursor positioning, key pressing or typing, and joystick manipulating.

7. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button—(14) moves or deforms so as to communicate a force lying along the surface of the communication or computing device.

8. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button—(14) moves or deforms so as to communicate a force directed orthogonally to the surface of the communication or computing device.

9. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button is so shaped as to allow imparting a force couple via the indicator instrument ~~the input button (14) moves or deforms so as to communicate a force couple and so~~ tending to cause a change in pitch of the input button—(14) relative to the surface of the communication or computing device, and wherein the input button moves or deforms so as to communicate the force couple.

10. (Currently amended) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button—(14) and means—(14b-e) for detecting the force

exerted on the input button-(14) are in combination provided as a box-in-box construction including an outer box-(51) and an inner box-(52), the inner box-(52) ~~having a receptacle (14a) formed so as to allow inserting into it a distal end (12) of the indicator instrument (11)~~ provided as the flattened shape having the indentation formed on the exposed surface, and the outer box having sensing means-(14b-e) responsive to forces applied to the inner box via the distal end portion-(12) of the indicator instrument (11), for providing a corresponding signal indicating a user input.

11. (Currently amended) A method for acquiring user inputs to a communication or computing device, ~~characterized by~~ comprising:

~~having a~~ receptacle of an input button-(14) lying in or on a surface of the communication or computing device ~~receive~~ receiving a distal end portion of an indicator instrument-(11) unattached to the input button, wherein the input button is a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle formed on the exposed surface for receiving the end portion of the indicator instrument; and

~~having the~~ input button-(14) ~~move moving or deform~~ deforming in response to a force or a force couple exerted on the input button-(14) via the distal end portion of the indicator instrument-(11).

12. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button-(14) is a sliding motion.

13. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button-(14) is a rocking motion

caused by applying a force couple to the input button via the indicator instrument.

14. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button-~~(14)~~ is a motion into or out of the surface of the communication or computing device.

15. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button-~~(14)~~ is a motion substantially in the plane of the surface of the communication or computing device.

16. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the indicator instrument-~~(11)~~ is used to provide user inputs that would otherwise be provided using a keyboard.

17. (New) An apparatus as in claim 10, wherein the inner box is so shaped as to allow imparting a force couple via the indicator instrument and so tending to cause a change in pitch of the input button relative to the surface of the communication or computing device, and wherein the sensing means are for providing a signal indicative of the force couple.

18. (New) A communication or computing device comprising an apparatus as in claim 1, and further comprising the indicator instrument and an indicator holder for storing the indicator when the indicator is not in use, wherein the indicator holder is attached to the side of the communication or computing device or integrated into a cover for the communication or computing device, and is shaped so as to allow snapping to a holding position when the indicator is pressed onto the holder.

19. (New) An apparatus for use in providing user inputs to a

communication or computing device, comprising:

an input button provided as a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle formed on the exposed surface for receiving an end portion of an indicator instrument unattached to the input button, and for receiving a force exerted on the input button via the indicator instrument; and

a sensor array disposed proximate to the receptacle for detecting the force exerted on the input button based on the input button moving or deforming in response to the force, and for providing a signal corresponding to the force.

20. (New) An apparatus as in claim 19, wherein the sensor array comprises a plurality of strain sensors.